

State of California
Business, Transportation & Housing Agency
Department of Transportation

Prepared by:
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Chief
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ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

05-SBt-156, KP 4.8/12.9 (PM 3.0/8.0)
Action Item

CTC Meeting: October 3, 2002

Reference No.: 2.2a.(1)

Original Signed By: _____

ROBERT L. GARCIA
Chief Financial Officer
October 1, 2002

SUMMARY - NOTICE OF PREPARATION
STATE ROUTE 156 IN SAN BENITO COUNTY – WIDEN TO FOUR LANES NEAR
HOLLISTER

05-SBt-156, KP 4.8/12.9 (PM 3.0/8.0)

From the Alameda in San Juan Bautista to 1.2 km (0.7 mi) east of Mitchell/Union Road near Hollister.

Proposed Action:

Widen Route 156 from two lanes to four lanes.

Programming:

The project is programmed in the 2002 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) with Interregional Improvement Program (IIP) funds of \$4,362,000 for support and \$3,770,000 for Right of Way. The total project cost is \$31,411,000 with additional funding to come from the 2004 STIP. Construction is scheduled to begin in FY 2004/05.

Alternatives Being Considered:

- No-build
- Construction of a four-lane conventional highway
- Construction of a four-lane expressway with two two-lane frontage roads
- Construction of a four-lane expressway with one two-lane frontage road and access easements

Potential Significant Environmental Effects:

- Impacts to cultural resources
- Impacts to farmlands
- Change in the visual character of the area

Proposed Measures to Minimize Harm:

- Modify alternatives to avoid or reduce impacts to cultural resources
- Purchase Farmland Conservation Easements to offset farmland impact
- Replant where appropriate and maintain visual character to extent possible

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

TO:

FROM: Caltrans, District 5
50 Higuera Street
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of a Environmental Assessment /Draft Environmental Impact Report
[References: Division 13, Public Resources Code, Section 21080.4 (State); 40 C.F.R. 1501.7
and 1508.22 (Federal)]

This is to inform you that the California Department of Transportation (Department) in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will be the Lead Agency and will prepare an EA/EIR for the project described below. Your participation as a responsible/cooperating agency (or interested agency, group, or individual) is requested in the preparation and review of this document.

We need to know the applicable permit and environmental review requirements and the scope and content of the environmental information that is relevant to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency will need to use the EA/EIR prepared by our agency when considering your permit or approval for the project. We are also interested in comments from those groups and individuals who are interested in the project, but are not responsible/cooperating agencies, so that we can design the project to best meet the needs of everyone concerned.

Project Title: San Juan Bautista Four Lane

Project Description: The Department proposes to widen Route 156 from two lanes to four lanes in San Benito County from The Alameda (KP 4.8 /PM 3.0) in San Juan Bautista to 1.2 km (0.7 miles) east of Mitchell/Union Road (KP 12.9/PM 8.0) near Hollister. The project consists of a no-build alternative, four major build alternatives, and four variations of the major alternatives.

Alternatives Considered:

A. No Build Alternative: There would be no changes to the existing highway facility with this alternative.

B. Build Alternatives: All build alternatives would contain these features:

The proposed highway will be raised gradually through the project limits to a maximum height of 5 feet to accommodate the regional flooding conditions of the area. This will provide drainage areas in the depressed median and in side drainage channels on both sides of the highway. In addition, an off-site drainage detention basin might be needed to help store and discharge storm water. The existing Route 156 lanes would be obliterated from Mission Vineyard Road to the Union/Mitchell Road intersection to accommodate the drainage channels, and all new lanes would be constructed to the south of the current alignment.

ALTERNATIVE 2) Alternative 2 proposes to construct a four-lane expressway and two two-lane frontage roads, one on the north and one on the south side of the expressway. Near Flint Road the four-lane expressway and both frontage roads would be shifted south to avoid the San Justo School. An unsignalized intersection would be constructed at the intersection with Mission Vineyard Road/Breen Road.

ALTERNATIVE 2A) This alternative is similar to Alternative 2, except that the four-lane expressway and frontage roads would be shifted north to avoid the San Justo School.

ALTERNATIVE 4) Alternative 4 proposes the construction of four-lane conventional highway. There would be no frontage roads. Near Flint Road the proposed highway would be shifted north to avoid the San Justo School. Left turn channelization would be constructed at the intersection of Route 156 with Breen Road/Mission Vineyard Road, Lucy Brown Lane, Bixby Road, Flint Road, and Union Road/Mitchell Road.

ALTERNATIVE 4A) This alternative is similar to Alternative 4, except that near Flint Road the proposed highway would be shifted south to avoid the San Justo School. This would preserve three existing homes that would otherwise be removed with Alternative 4.

ALTERNATIVE 5) Alternative 5 proposes to construct a four-lane expressway with one two-lane frontage road on the north side of the highway. It is similar to Alternative 2A, except that it deletes the south frontage road and substitutes it with access easements for the adjacent parcels. It provides an access intersection at Bixby Road, which may or may not be signalized. The frontage road is shifted to the north slightly at Bixby Road to provide sufficient distance between the two adjacent intersections. Near Flint Road the four-lane expressway and frontage road would be shifted north to avoid the San Justo School.

ALTERNATIVE 5A) This Alternative is similar to Alternative 5, except that the new access intersection would be provided at Lucy Brown Lane.

ALTERNATIVE 6) Alternative 6 proposes to construct a four-lane expressway with one two-lane frontage road on the north side of the highway. It is similar to Alternative 2, except that it deletes the south frontage road and substitutes it with access easements for the adjacent parcels. It provides an access intersection at Bixby Road, which may or may not be signalized. The frontage road is shifted to the north slightly at Bixby Road to provide sufficient distance between the two adjacent intersections. Near Flint Road the four-lane expressway and frontage road would be shifted south to avoid the San Justo School.

ALTERNATIVE 6A) This Alternative is similar to Alternative 6, except that the new access intersection would be provided at Lucy Brown Lane.

Probable Environmental Effects:

- Impacts to cultural resources (John Breen Adobe and San Justo School)
- Impacts to farmlands (acquisition of Prime Agricultural Land for Transportation use)
- Change in the visual character of the area
- Relocation of residents
- Increase in noise levels
- Impacts to biological resources, including San Juan Creek
- Tree and vegetation removal
- Impacts to hydrology (construction of new drainage facilities)
- Temporary construction impacts to residents

Background and Scoping

Route 156 was built in 1961 as a two-lane conventional highway with the concept that two additional lanes would be added at some future date. In 1965, Route 156 was expanded to a four-lane expressway from the interchange at Route 101 (KP 0.16/PM 0.1) to Monterey Street in San Juan Bautista (KP 3.7/PM 2.3). In 1994,

Route 156 was further widened to four lanes from Monterey Street (KP 3.7/PM 2.3) to just east of The Alameda (KP 5.3/ PM 3.3) and The Alameda intersection was signalized. Additional projects upgraded the stretch of Route 156 from the interchange at Route 101 to the Alameda from 1996 to 1999. In 1997, a new two-lane expressway known as the Hollister By-pass was constructed just past the Mitchell/Union Road intersection to divert through traffic around the town of Hollister. The existing highway through Hollister remained in place and is now called Business Route 156.

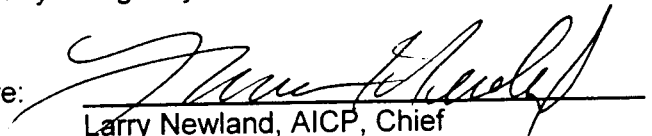
The proposed project is known as the "Gap" because Route 156 is a two-lane conventional highway within the project limits, which represents a gap between the existing four-lane expressway immediately to the west and the convergence of two two-lane facilities on the east (Hollister By-pass and Business Route 156). As a result of increased traffic demands and delays, the County of San Benito initiated this project through the Regional Transportation Plans.

A multi-agency team has been formed to address scoping issues. The team includes members from the Department, the Council of San Benito County Governments, the City of San Juan Bautista, the City of Hollister, and the public. The team will meet as necessary to address issues throughout the project development process. This team facilitated a Public Informational Meeting/Open House that was held on March 7, 2001. The purpose of the meeting was to provide information to interested residences and business owners in the area. Written and oral comments were solicited at the meeting. The received comments initiated the creation of additional alternatives to respond to public concerns.

Due to the time limits mandated by state law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date, but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice. Please send your response and direct any comments or questions regarding this project to Larry Newland at the address shown above (phone: 805-542-4603). With your response, please include the name of a contact person in your agency.

Date: August 30, 2002

Signature:
Title:


Larry Newland, AICP, Chief
Central Coast Environmental Analysis

A map of California with county boundaries. A black arrow points to a small, shaded rectangular area in the Central Valley, specifically within the boundaries of Fresno and Madera counties. Below the map, the text "Project Area" is written in a bold, sans-serif font.

A map of San Benito County, California, with a stippled texture. The county is outlined in black. In the northwest corner, a small area is circled with a thick black line, and the number '156' is written inside the circle. An arrow points from the text 'Project Vicinity' to this circled area. The text 'San Juan Bautista' is written to the left of the circle. The text 'Hollister' is written to the right of the circle. The text 'San Benito County' is written in large letters in the lower right portion of the map. The text 'San Juan' is partially visible at the top right.

The map illustrates the project area, bounded by a line labeled "Project Limits". Key features include:

- Roads:** San Juan Creek, San Juan Bautista, Alameda, Mission Vineyard Road, Lucy Brown Lane, Bixby Road, Flint Road, Mitchell Road, and Union Road.
- Landmarks:** John Breen Adobe, San Justo School, and The Adobe.
- Waterways:** San Benito River and San Juan Creek.
- Highway:** Highway 156 is shown with a shield marker.
- Directional Indicators:** Arrows point "To Hollister" and "To San Jose".
- Scale and Orientation:** A north arrow is located in the bottom left. A scale bar at the bottom indicates distances of 3 miles on either side of a central 0 point.
- Project Limits:** A line labeled "Project Limits" runs horizontally across the map, with a small square marker at its western end near the Alameda road.